



**BOB TAFT**  
GOVERNOR  
STATE OF OHIO

April 11, 2006

Dorcus R. Hardy, Chairman  
WHCoA Policy Committee  
4350 East West Highway  
3rd Floor  
Bethesda, MD 20814

Dear Chairman Hardy:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the results of the 2005 White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA). Prior to the WHCoA, I convened a rally to educate the Ohio delegation on Ohio's aging issues and to discuss priorities. Please note, Merle Grace Kearns, Director of the Ohio Department of Aging and leader of the 42 member delegation from Ohio has briefed me on conference activities and resolutions.

The top ten WHCoA resolutions are similar to those identified by Ohio delegates and participants at our local events. Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act and developing a coordinated, comprehensive long-term care strategy were our top priorities.

The latter, developing a coordinated, comprehensive long-term care strategy, has been a priority of my administration for the last seven years. In 2001, we began to implement Ohio Access: Strategic Plan to Improve Long-Term Services and Supports for People with Disabilities. This plan was updated in 2004 and used by my cabinet directors to plan and prepare Ohio's state fiscal year 2006-2007 budget. That budget included several initiatives to strengthen our system of Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) and enhance consumer choice:

- **Assisted Living:** Recently, Ohio was approved to implement a Medicaid HCBS waiver for assisted living. The waiver is limited to individuals age 21 and over who require a nursing facility level of care and are currently residing in a nursing facility or receiving services from an existing Medicaid waiver. The waiver is projected to start July 1, 2006 with the capacity to serve 1,800 individuals.
- **Self-Directed Care:** The budget expanded our Choices Medicaid HCBS waiver, which allows consumers to employ their own direct care worker. It also created a pilot Medicaid waiver to explore different methods of self-directed care, including use of debit cards and vouchers.

- **Aging and Disability Resource Centers:** The U.S. Administration on Aging and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services awarded Ohio a grant to develop an Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). Our pilot ADRC, to be anchored in the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging in Cleveland, will link local and regional entities and create a seamless service experience for consumers age 60 and older, as well as adults age 18 and older with physical disabilities. Consumers will access the network via Internet, phone or in person.
- **Home First:** This provision addresses the wait list for the PASSPORT HCBS Waiver by permitting individuals who are on the wait list and residing in a nursing facility to be enrolled on the PASSPORT waiver ahead of those on the wait list in the community. In effect, Medicaid funds used to pay for services in a nursing facility follow the consumer back to the community.

Reauthorizing the Older Americans Act (OAA) in 2006 was the top priority of our WHCoA delegation. In 2000, Ohio successfully advocated for reauthorization of OAA. The 2000 amendments, especially the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP), have benefited older Ohioans and their caregivers significantly. Our WHCoA delegation met with Congressional staff to advocate for OAA reauthorization and specific amendments that would benefit older Ohioans. Later this spring, the Ohio Department of Aging plans to reconvene Ohio's WHCoA delegates and enlist their continued support as the OAA reauthorization moves through Congress.

The OAA has created a foundation for Ohio's aging network (e.g., area agencies on aging, long-term care ombudsman, senior centers, service providers) to grow. In addition to managing OAA funded programs, our aging network operates one of the largest Medicaid HCBS waivers in the country and generates over \$100,000,000 from county senior services property tax levies.

If you or your staff has any questions about Ohio's involvement in the WHCoA and/or our aging network, services and initiatives, please contact Merle Grace Kearns, Director, Ohio Department of Aging, at 614-466-7246 or [mkearns@age.state.oh.us](mailto:mkearns@age.state.oh.us).

Thank you for your leadership in making the 2005 WHCoA a reality. I look forward to receiving the final report, including the implementation strategies developed by the WHCoA delegates.

Sincerely,



Bob Taft  
Governor

Attachments:

- Ohio Access: Strategic Plan to improve long-term services and supports for People with Disabilities, 2004
- Top Eight Recommendations from Ohio for Reauthorization
- Ohio's Older Americans Act Profile 2005